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AN
A C C O U N T
OF
JOHN WESTCOTE,
LATE PORTER K.
To the RIGHT HONOURABLE
The EARL of HARRINGTON.
IN WHICH IS LAID DOWN
AN EFFECTUAL METHOD
For preventing THEFT and ROBBERY.

Effodiuntur opes irritamenta malorum.

OVID. METAM.



L O N D O N :

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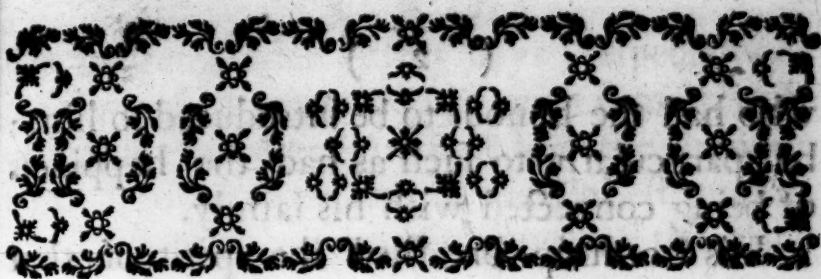
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AN
ACCOUNT
OF
JOHN WESTCOTE.

JOHN WESTCOTE, the subject of the following pages, was born at Leeds in Yorkshire, of mean parents, whose circumstances hindered his being trained up in any of the principles of learning, or being under the influence of a benign or generous example. His first years were spent in obscurity, his middle days in luxury and affluence, and his latter end has been shameful.

Tho' his birth was obscure and his opportunities to learn but scanty and defective, yet being of a good mein and of a genius that was far from being sordid, he left his father from a disgust, and coming up to London, found means to get himself introduced into the service of the Earl of Harrington, a Nobleman whose generosity of heart and virtuous disposition inclined him to do every act of tenderness and humanity toward those
B who

who had the honour to be introduced to him; but particularly to such as had the happiness of being connected with his family.

His Lordship breathed the spirit of that Viscount Stanhope who was Secretary of State, and managed the affairs of the kingdom so well in the first and most ticklish years of King George I. he inherited all his virtues, and erred in nothing but in carrying his generosity and goodness to an extream, without examining the merit or unworthiness of the object on whom his favours were to be conferred: His Lady, a daughter of the Duke of Grafton, being of the same generosity of sentiment, indulged such as served her so much, as to be the loser by it. Many have made their fortunes, and now live in easy circumstances, under the influence and benignity of his Lordship and his Consort.

Among the number of those who shared the undistinguished smiles of his Master was Westcote, who had the address to get himself admitted Porter to his Lordship, and to be put into the place of the greatest trust and importance, and to which none but people of the best character and decorum ought to be received.

Westcote had lived in this station and character for about four years, and had by the gratuity of Gentlemen and Ladies, added to his wages and the effects of his Master's liberality, procured to the amount of 100l. which if properly laid out, might with Care and Prudence, enable him to live comfortably for

for the remainder of his days ; especially as he contracted acquaintance with some people of a mercantile genius, and had the honour to be known to persons of the highest quality and distinction, in consequence of the place which he held.

Had he confined himself to the company of those who trade fairly, and are directed by principles of generosity and conscience, he might have enjoyed the fruits of his labour and of his patron's indulgence ; but unluckily being of a roaming disposition, he became acquainted with some of the usurers about Chelsea-hospital, a sett of men who had by fraud, circumvention and injustice, sucked the very vitals of the superannuated soldiers who had grown old in the service of their country, and had lost their blood in extending its glory and interest.

Among the number of those with whom he became acquainted was the noted Fitzgerald commonly known by the name of Campbell, who kept the King of Bohemia's Head, in Wilderness-Row, at Chelsea : Of the people who exercised the infamous trade of usury none was more adept in all the tricks and frauds of a finished villain than he ! By craft and dissimulation he had wrought himself into the good graces of the unthinking and credulous ; by an effrontery of which there is not a parallel he had assumed the name of Scotsman and Irishman by turns ; and what is incredible in itself, tho' literally true, he shot off his left hand to the intent he might receive the royal bounty, from which by his quitting

General Stewart's regiment abruptly, he had almost been excluded: So adept did he become in the several acts of knavery, as to forge the hand-writing of poor men, and send them to prison on pretended notes of hand, and detain them till true notes and a general release were obtained.

How fortunate for Westcote to have taken warning by the fatal exit made by Campbell, who for forging a note of hand for 1350 l. in the name of one Joseph Pearson, one of the band of Gentlemen Pensioners, was executed on the 2d of April, 1761. Westcote was not so wise as to take example; he had fixed his eyes upon riches as the sole object of his endeavours, and the ultimate end of his expectation and hopes; By means of Campbell he became acquainted with the adepts in roguery, and such as lived upon over-reaching their neighbours. He frequented houses of the meanest appearance, night-cellars, and such as had all the aspect of fitness for what was fraudulent and mean; he frequently visited the Red Lion in Bow-street, behind Westminster-market, for as the landlord of this, T—m J—ys, was acquainted with Campbell, he thought he might one day or other have an occasion to make use of J—ys' habitation for a purpose that might contribute to his Interest. He likewise became acquainted with James Cooper, who kept a chandler's shop at Turnstile, Holborn, and by means of Cooper he was introduced into the company of Bradley, his associates in the iniquity for which he was overtaken and punished by the law.

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This Bradley, an Irishman by birth, was one of those who not finding encouragement in their own country, seek shelter in the great metropolis of the British empire; he had squandered what money he had in excess and riot, in lasciviousness and chimerical pursuits, and, if fame is not a liar, had become an adept in the hidden arts of pilfering and secreting of goods. Being reduced to the confines of want by prodigality and wantonness, he applied to Westcote for his interest to be admitted into a place in Lord Harrington's family, which the other readily agreed to promote upon the first vacancy that should fall. The proposal meeting with so generous an acceptance, cherished that familiarity which had so long subsisted, and ripened it to such a degree, that Westcote, as if he were abandoned in an instant by the checks of honour and of conscience, proposed the iniquitous scheme which so lately has been brought to light, and has terminated so unfortunately for both.

As you, said Westcote to Bradley, seem to be in need of an immediate relief in order to stop the mouths of your creditors, and to protect you against the snares of those dregs of mankind the bailiffs and their followers, I will, if you can keep a secret, put you in a way of obtaining more than you think of; nothing but secrecy and resolution are required upon your part, and in a very short time you may have in your possession more than is sufficient to relieve you. Bradley, like others of his genius and turn of mind, swore there
was

was not a man upon earth who could keep a secret more closely than he could, and with the most solemn asseverations protested, that no man on earth had more courage to execute a plan vigorously than himself. I am always, said he, — *in utrumque paratus seu versare dolos, seu cert accumbere morti.*

Though the binding with oaths be but feeble ties and weak bonds upon such as have made a sacrifice of a good conscience, that continual feast of an honest mind, and tho' it be observable that seldom or never men habituated to cursing, or to the learning every new way to swear, are bound by their engagements, which want all the requisites of formality, yet Westcote was so much wrought on by the protestations of his acquaintance, that he all at once laid down the infamous proposal. " My master Lord Harrington, " said Westcote, is never without bags of " money, and perhaps he possesses more in " specie than any other Nobleman ; I can " have access to his repositories, and if we " manage matters well, we may soon be enriched by our conduct." Bradley heard the proposal with a visible alacrity, and desiring to be informed further, Westcote proceeded to lay down the scheme more fully ; he told him that his Lordship's parlour where the repository stood, in which the money lay deposited, was, in a manner, detached from the other chambers of the house, that the locks both of the door and the bureau were easily forced open, and that without any noise ; and, in order to facilitate the matter,

we

we shall embrace the next day, being the 13th of December, for accomplishing our intended scheme, as my Lord and Lady with the family are to be at the Opera. Bradley was more and more fired with a desire to execute what had been, in his apprehension, planned with such understanding and acuteness; in a word, it was settled that he should come about half an hour past six in the evening, when he should be set down in the porter's lodge, and there be secreted in the most comfortable manner, with victuals and drink for his entertainment, and in the mean time he was advised to take a bumper of true French brandy in order to hearten him in the execution of his design. In a word, at this conversation every thing was determined that might be conducive to the dark and execrable project; and what not a little animated them, Bradley told him, that his landlord, Cooper, was a man who understood business well, that he had a cellar wherein any thing might be deposited with great safety, and what was still a further encouragement, that you might as well get a word from the sole of his foot as from his mouth, if once he was enjoined secrecy. All things being settled, they went together to Cooper, informed him of their design, which meeting with his approbation, nothing remained but to enter upon what had been concerted.

Accordingly on the fatal night of the 13th of December, 1763, being the day following, Bradley came to the Stable-yard according to appointment. And as Lord Harrington with his

his family were gone to the Opera in the Hay-market, the house was in a manner solitary and dull ; after refreshing themselves plentifully, Westcote conducted Bradley into the kitchen and shewed him a back window which, said he, we will leave open, and by it you may get into the garden and clamber over the wall, and directly proceed to Cooper's house where the booty may be secreted ; the scheme being laid, every thing being prepared and the hour of action approaching, as my Lord and Lady repaired to their room, and the servants went to their several apartments, Westcote between the hours of one and two in the morning, being the time when every person might be apprehended to be asleep, with his accomplice, pulled off their shoes and went up stairs Westcote being the conductor, the doors were opened easily and without making the least noise, and curiosity prompting him to go as near his master's bedchamber as possible, he returned with the encouraging news that all was quiet and that both my Lord and Lady were fast asleep, they proceeded with so little reserve as to force open the lock of his Lordship's bureau out of which Bradley took one bank note of 100 l. one of 30 l. two small tin boxes each about six inches deep and six inches long and four inches broad, in which beside the notes they found three hundred guineas in the one and ninety five in the other, three gold snuff boxes, one gold repeating watch, a silver candlestick and standish on which were curiously engraved the arms of the Stanhope family. The robbery

bery being perpetrated they thought proper to leave the door half open, and in the mean time Bradley judging it more safe to go forth by the wicket of the gate than to leap over the wall, he repaired to the front of the garden dyke in order to bespatter it with mudd, that might give it the appearance of having been scaled by thieves and to give the more feasible appearance the window of the kitchen that looked into the garden was left open.

By the time that every thing was accomplished it was past two o'clock, when Bradley set out with his booty, and went by the way of St. James's-square, Leicester-square, Cranbone-alley, and Long acre, and arrived at his lodgings in Little Turnstile, near the Duke of Newcastle's residence, about a quarter before three: He called out softly, Cooper, Cooper, but Cooper was not within; however Cooper's wife was, and after expressing her surprize that her husband was not along with him, she assured him his landlord was not in the way. As the associates in villainy must be supposed to be left to themselves, to be chained by the links of wickedness, and to be tied by the fetters thereof, so she sometimes appears in her deformity, and raises an horror by the least glimmerings of her aspect. Bradley, however callous and obdurate, yet begun to be a little startled and uneasy at not finding his landlord at home: He therefore withdrew immediately to a Soup-house near Temple-bar, in order to find him out, and here meeting with a second Disappointment, he repaired

paired to a Night-cellar in Wych-street, behind St. Clement's Church, where he found his confederate; his uneasiness now subsiding, they called for some punch in order to rouse their spirits, and indeed drank heartily that they might save themselves "the trouble of thinking," and taking a review of what they had done.

This being over, the two brethren of iniquity repaired to their habitation, where without any long consultation, they took out a stone from the pavement in the cellar, dug a hole sufficient to contain the boxes, the watch and candlestick, and so artfully laid the stone in its place that no fraud could be suspected. And so taking another dram and ordering a good dinner to be got ready at noon they each retired to repose.

But while Bradley and Cooper were safe each in his own apartment, a stir began in Lord Harrington's on seeing the bureau that had been broke open, and on missing the money and notes that had been therein contained. The servants, both men and women, were all called up stairs, every one excused himself, and none appeared more surprized, nor more strongly declared their innocence, than Westcote: The window of the kitchen was discovered to be open, the outside of the garden wall to be spattered, but no marks of any footsteps in the garden, tho' the ground was wet and capable of impresson, nor yet upon the nicest inspection could any filth be found upon the stairs or in the parlour, which made one say merrily, these thieves have not

travelled from far. As this observation could not fail of suggesting that the robbery could not have been committed by a stranger or strangers, it naturally led his Lordship to a further enquiry; and so without hesitation the servants were respectively searched, and eighteen guineas were found in the pocket of Westcote: Some people began to entertain a remote suspicion of him from this circumstance, but as his Lordship had observed him always to be sober and careful, so both he and his Lady with great politeness and humanity vindicated him from any imputation on that account, for they both generously said, "that a person of such care and industry as they had always observed in Westcote, might very easily save so small and inconsiderable a sum," and this without harbouring the remotest suspicion of the guilty person. His Lordship ordered an advertisement to be drawn up, describing the several things that had been carried off, and mentioning the number of the notes, to the intent they might be stopt at the Bank or any where else if offered to be changed.

Hitherto every thing was safe on the side of the conspirators; the gold which they had taken could not be distinguished from others of the same stamp, value and quantity; the notes and watch were safe in Cooper's cellar, and as for the candlestick and standish on which were the arms of the Harrington family, these were broken into different pieces in order to prevent discovery.

But whether Westcote had observed any

real suspicion in the servants, or that he thought so, as his conscience could not fail to accuse him; he at any event thought proper to leave his Lordship's service, and repairing to the lodging of his confederates, he declared an entire satisfaction in the several methods they had taken, but with none more than that of secreting the booty which he and Bradley had procured. Their intimacy increased upon it, they had the money in common, each of them had access to the cellar, and was at liberty to take out what he pleased. Cooper paid some of his creditors that were most troublesome, Bradley rolled in profusion, while Westcote attended the cock-matches at the Cock-pit by Queen-street, Westminster, where he laid considerable wagers, as he did at the horse races at Epsom, Barnet and Newmarket; in all which he, like other gamblers, sometimes lost, sometime gained; but upon the whole he diminished his ill-procured substance.

In about four months not only the money which they found in Lord Harrington's house, but that which they had raised by the sale of the pieces of the candlestick and standish were spent, and now they were reduced to the necessity of putting off the Bank notes, which daily examples rendered hazardous and uncertain; for the many robberies upon the road, with the frequent forgeries committed upon the Bank, Companies and private persons, had not only whetted the invention of the legislature, but had also raised a cautious circumspection in the clerks of the public and private

private offices ; and as these notes had been so frequently advertised, it was in a manner impracticable to put them off any where within the bills of mortality.

After many consultations Westcote be-
thought himself of a method which met
with the others approbation ; he went down
to Chester in order to buy some linen, and
proposed to exchange the notes with the sel-
ler. Accordingly he met with a person who
he thought would not be over-curious, and
bought webs of linen and cloth to the amount
of 30 l. paid the 100 l. note into his hand,
and desired either cash or notes for the re-
mainder. The man was a little startled at
first, or at least Westcote thought so ; for on
his arrival in London he magnified the ex-
ploit he had performed, and blessed his stars
for having come off without being detected,
which, according to himself, he twice very
narrowly escaped. And indeed, it must be
owned, that the man was well versed in the
arts of subterfuge and evasion, for when he
was first taken up upon suspicion, and con-
ducted to the Public Office, in Bow-street,
Covent-garden, he was so punctual in every
thing, and gave such a plausible account of
himself as to escape the lyncean eye of that
Magistrate, who, from long practice, has
reduced the method of detecting rogues into
an art, whereof he is certainly a consummate
master ; for twice the Justice of Peace dis-
missed him, having found no fault in him.

Truth has something candid and noble in
itself, and is ever attended with advantage,
even

even in the mouth of the most abandoned: Had Westcote acted with candour he might have been still alive, but what was a momentary and seeming benefit, turn'd out fatal for him.

As the neighbours about little Turnstile read in the papers of Westcote's being taken up, and had observ'd him, Cooper and Bradley to be uncommonly busy and attentive, so their mouths were opened, and Westcote was a third time taken up to the tribunal in Bow-Street, where the person to whom he had put off one of the notes was confronted with him, and where to his great mortification, Lord Harrington's gold watch, and fifty three guineas were found upon him, and now when it was too late he began to speak with more candour, discovered his accomplices and profferd his service as an evidence for the Crown.

The Justice told him with great propriety, that he could not give him a positive answer, whether his proffer would be accepted, untill his accomplices had undergone an examination; but at the same time assured him, that the only means by which he could attain his end, was to be ingenuous and to act with candour and discretion; the arguments of his worship were too strong to be refuted, and the prisoner's spirits were too much damped to suggest an immediate answer. He was directly committed to the Gatehouse, while a party was sent to Little Turnstile; in quest of Cooper and of Bradley, the first of whom was found, but the other, being trained up in the school of villainy, made his escape, and had

got

got down to Wapping, where he put on a sailor's habit; however, he could not delude the Wappinners by that disguise; they observed a sort of awkwardness in him, and several times discovered such sudden changes from mirth to melancholy, and from sadness to confusion, as raised apprehensions.

The poor man was sitting in a tap-room amidst a promiscuous company, when those in search of him came in; the maid had just drawn him a pint of beer, and he had not once drank out of it: but the moment he set his eyes upon them, he dropt the Newspaper which he had but just then taken up; confusion was visible in every feature, he offered to pay for his liquor without tasting it, and at any rate wanted to be gone. Westcote and the neighbours near Cooper's house, had described the person and complexion of the man, every thing tended to undo him; the pursuers, like the staunch hound smelling the hare by his footsteps, discovered the man by the very outlines of his conduct: They asked his name and to what ship he belonged, and receiving no satisfactory answer, they fixed their eyes the more intently upon him, and charged him to be the very Bradley they were in quest of; the company took the alarm and joined in the assertion; the man was seized that moment, and conducted in triumph to Bow-street, where, upon examination, he made a full discovery, and then was sent to the Gatehouse, so that Sir John Fielding had nothing now but to consider whether Bradley or Westcote was the properest object

object of the Royal Mercy; and to make the surer work, he ordered him to be brought before him on the 4th and 5th of December, when he was re-examined upon the discoveries he had made with respect to the robbery in the house of Lord Harrington; and to shew the further assiduity of that Magistrate, he ordered all three to be brought before him on Saturday the 8th of December, when Bradley not only confirmed all he had said, but also impeached his accomplices with a robbery in the chambers of Mr. Montague, in Lincoln's-inn-fields, from whence they stole a gold watch, several diamond rings and other things of value, and also charged them with a robbery in the house of Mr. Burton, of Hatton-garden. In his relation of facts he was more distinct and full than Westcote, and seemed to know more, which not only determined Sir John, but likewise Justice Spynage, a gentleman of sound judgment and sagacity, to fix upon Bradley as the evidence for the Crown, because he only was capable of convicting Cooper for receiving the goods, knowing them to be stolen, a crime in my humble apprehension, no less than theft or robbery.

'Tis admirably well observed by Sir George M'Kenzie in his Institutions, that every crime ought to be punished proportionably to the degree of secrecy wherewith it is committed, or to the degree of safety that the perpetrator is in for some time after. Thus forgery is more atrocious than theft or house-breaking, for a man may secure his house and repositories from being broke open; but he cannot hinder
a man

a man from forging his name ; nor yet can he stop his goods from being received by a third person. Had Cooper refused to accept of Lord Harrington's property, neither Westcote nor Bradley would have been so vigorous in the execution of their plan, which, however well-concerted, was at last found out by the assiduity of Sir John Fielding, who does every business so well, that one would think he had nothing in hand except that very case which lay immediately before him ; for notwithstanding the multiplicity of business upon his hands, and that he was involved in a law-suit with Justice Lane for a wrong commitment, in which he was cast in the costs of suit and in 50*l.* damages, yet he had these associates in villainy five times before him in the space of twelve days, viz. on the 26th of November the day when Westcote first was taken up, on the 1st of December, on the 4th, 5th and 8th of that month likewise ; and having traced out the matter to its first source, bound over Lord Harrington, Bevel his steward, and the other servants to prosecute, and sent Bradley and Cooper to separate apartments in the Gatehouse, while Westcote was remanded in his irons to Newgate till the 14th, when his and the trial of Cooper came on before Mr Baron Adams, who acted with his usual moderation and candour in the whole affair. Many witnesses appeared for the Crown, but Bradley's evidence was the most clear and entirely fixed the guilt upon the prisoner ; that of Bevel, his Lordship's steward was somewhat tedious and uninteresting, perhaps the man was unaccus-

tomed to speak in Court, and to this might be owing his inaccuracy. When the evidence came to be summed up, the Judge observed, that an accomplice's testimony ought to be received with particular caution; and as Bradley had, by his declaration, virtually confessed himself to be as infamous a fellow as had ever appeared in that Court, so no further credit was to be given to his declaration than as it was confirmed by other circumstances; and to the Jury, after hearing the whole summed up in a plain, easy and impartial manner, retired for about three-quarters of an hour, finding Westcote guilty.

Perhaps since the time a noted toyman near the Courts of Justice had a narrow escape by means of a merciful Jury and the goodness of his character, when he was tried for stealing snuff-boxes, the Court-house has not been more full, the trials of Rice the broker, or of Gardelle not excepted; several persons of the first distinction being desirous to know the issue of an affair in which every man of fortune and property was more or less concern'd.

After being found guilty, an unhappy notion that he would be reprieved, hindered his laying the matter so seriously to heart as might have been wished; but in this case he was mistaken, for as the law stands, no man of character would employ his good offices in favour of so base and so detestable a crime; which, even in the reign of William the Conqueror, when no crime was punished capitally * except that of murder or treason, would

* See Mr. Henderson's Life of William the Conqueror.

would have been adverted to in a singular manner.

It would be going too great a length to write against a custom that has so long prevailed in Britain and Ireland, as that of punishing theft and robbery with death; and yet we cannot help saying, that *salus possive est suprema lex*. The crimes are breaches of the eighth and tenth commandments, so is slander and lying, so is adultery, dishonouring of Magistrates and taking the sacred name of God in vain, which last mentioned sins, tho' not capitally punished, are yet as odious as the others; neither is the *fraus meritoria*, if carried beyond its due bounds, unattended with horror and detestation; for a toymen to sell a snuff-box for 6 s. that usually vends at 1 s. to sell a ring for gold which is only brass, tin buckles for silver, to charge articles at 7 s. instead of 1 s. 1 l. 16 s. instead of 4 s. or at 2 l. 10 s. instead of 7 s. is a crime no less heinous in the sight of God and man than that of theft and robbery; covetousness is accounted idolatry, whereof the Dutch Jews and their offspring, or wretches of a mongrel descent, are most flagrantly guilty.

Could a method be fallen on for more effectually punishing robbery and theft than by death, it would certainly be doing a real service to this flourishing kingdom, this magnificent and great metropolis: Let the malefactor be confined to hard labour in that particular branch wherein he was trained, and if of no trade, let him be sent to one of the remotest places in this extensive empire; let the initial
letter

letter of his crime stamped upon his forehead, such as F for forgery, R for robbery, S for sodomy and T for theft. Such glaring marks of infamy cannot fail to awaken the most callous and obdurate, and answer the end of the law and even of punishment which is salutary and medicinal, no less than death itself; as Cæsar very nobly expresses himself before the senate of Rome. “ The generality of mankind are affected with the last scenes, and even with respect to the most execrable of mortals, they are apt to condemn the Judge for pronouncing sentence, but forget the crime whereof the guilty was convicted. Of this Westcote is a recent and flagrant example; all about Bowstreet, both such as were present at his examination and such as saw him pass along to his place of confinement, were touched with his misfortune, only Tom Tollis, habituated to blood, said, “ he has good cloaths and these will fit me well.” And indeed it is no wonder, for he was a comely-looking man, a very decent-like servant, always neat and clean, and at a proper age of life being about 35 years old.

After being informed that he was to die along with six others, he more seriously went into himself, and prepared for launching out into Eternity. A review of his ingratitude to the best of Masters, and to a Lady whose least qualification was to be the greatest beauty of her age, presented a more shocking spectacle than the prospect of Tyburn; however, he expiated his guilt with his tears, and on the

the 9th of January finished his life at Tyburn amidst the sympathizing groans of all who saw him.

The Reader will not construe any thing said here of some considerable personages as flowing from a return of a favour conferred upon the Author: The Writer of this has no friends to procure him any place or pension, nor did he ever apply except for that of being a King's Messenger, for which he judged himself qualified in every respect, being capable of writing a letter in five different languages, and of speaking the Latin tolerably well, as also being of a sound constitution and capable of fatigue; but in this he was disappointed, and a footman preferred before him.

All he proposes in these pages is to set out the unhappy circumstances of a man cut off in the prime of life, that the legislature may think upon a method of rendering transgressors themselves beneficial to their country.

F I N I S.



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